



# Tobacco and Vapor Nicotine Products: Educational Information for Parents and Students

Despite positive gains in the reduction of tobacco use over the past few decades, tobacco is still the leading cause of preventable death at 480,000 deaths per year in the U.S., according to the Virginia Department of Health.

The 2019 National Youth Tobacco Survey (conducted jointly by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration) shows a reduction in traditional cigarette smoking among middle and high school students, but dramatic increases (double from 2017 to 2019) in the use of electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), also known as e-cigarettes, vapes, vape-pens, mods, electronic smoking devices, and JUULs, with nearly a third (32.7%) of adolescents reporting having used these products. The reasons cited for use include:

- Use of these products by friends or family members;
- Availability of many appealing flavors; and
- The belief that these products are safer than traditional cigarettes.

Electronic smoking or vaping devices can contain larger doses of nicotine than traditional cigarettes, which is highly addictive. A 2016 Surgeon General's report concluded that youth use of nicotine in any form, including e-cigarettes, is unsafe, causes addiction, and can harm adolescent brain development, which impacts attention, memory and learning. E-cigarettes can also expose users to harmful and carcinogenic chemicals such as formaldehyde and lead. Studies have found that young people who use e-cigarettes are more likely to become adult smokers.

Parents should understand how prevalent e-cigarettes are, as well as the serious health risks they pose to youth, in order to protect teens from this growing threat. Even students who do not use these products are likely to have friends who do. Many of these products look like pens or flash drives, and they can be disguised as watches or tucked into the sleeve of a hoodie. These disguises help kids hide them from parents and teachers.

Parents should talk to their children about the health risks of e-cigarettes and create an open dialogue. Know the products, know the risks, know the signs of use, and make sure you can protect your children against this growing health crisis.

## References and More Information

- What Parents Need to Know (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids):  
<https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/protectkids/resources-for-parents/what-parents-need-to-know>
- Quick Facts on the Risks of E-cigarettes for Kids, Teens, and Young Adults (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention): [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic\\_information/e-cigarettes/Quick-Facts-on-the-Risks-of-E-cigarettes-for-Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults.html](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/Quick-Facts-on-the-Risks-of-E-cigarettes-for-Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults.html)
- Youth Tobacco & Nicotine Use Toolkit (Virginia Department of Health):  
<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/91/2020/05/Toolkit-5.14.20.pdf>

- 4 things parents need to know about JUUL and nicotine addiction (Truth Initiative): <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/emerging-tobacco-products/4-things-parents-need-know-about-juul-and-nicotine>
- Kids and Smoking (American Lung Association): <https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking/helping-teens-quit/kids-and-smoking>

## Vaping Facts from the American Lung Association

Research shows that vaping is dangerous, highly addictive, and harmful to a child’s health and brain development. And, like other addictions, it’s easier to never start than to try to stop. Get the facts so you can have a conversation with your child: <https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking/helping-teens-quit/talk-about-vaping/vaping-facts>

### What Is Vaping? Isn’t vaping just “flavored water vapor”?

No. Vaping involves inhaling “e-juice” in the form of aerosol produced by an electronic cigarette or vape device. The aerosols typically contain flavorings such as diacetyl (a chemical linked to serious lung disease), nicotine, and other harmful chemicals. Vape cartridges, or “pods,” can also be filled with THC, CBD, or other “e-juice.”

### Are vape devices and e-cigarettes the same thing?

Yes, e-cigarettes and vaping devices are synonymous. Ever-evolving slang or brand names are also used to refer to vaping.

### What do e-cigarettes and vaping devices look like?

E-cigarettes and vape devices come in a number of forms. While some resemble tobacco products, others resemble household objects like USB devices, pens, highlighters, and chargers. Some devices are designed for one-time use and are disposable.



### What are the signs of use?

Vaping is easy to hide, and the signs can be easy to miss. Unlike traditional cigarettes, e-cigarettes do not leave the telltale scent of tobacco. If you notice any of the following things, it’s best to talk with your child about whether or not they are vaping:

- Presence of unfamiliar technology, online purchases, or packaging;
- Faint sweet or fruity scents;
- Behavioral and mood changes;
- Increased irritability or restlessness;
- Cutting back on caffeine;
- Desire for flavor due to taste bud degradation; and/or
- Physical symptoms including increased thirst, nosebleeds, and pneumonia.

**Why should I be concerned if my child is vaping?**

Vaping is harmful and dangerous to kids. Almost all vape liquid contains nicotine, which is addictive and harmful to adolescent brain development, and vaping aerosols contain chemicals linked to serious lung disease, as well as heavy metals.

**What makes it addictive?**

E-cigarettes deliver a high level of nicotine very quickly. Each vape pod can contain as much nicotine as a pack of cigarettes. Most kids don't know that the chemicals in e-cigarettes are addictive when they try vaping for the first time.

**Why is nicotine so harmful?**

Nicotine is harmful to developing brains, affecting attention, learning, mood, impulse control, and memory. Nicotine use in youth can increase risk for addiction to other drugs as well including traditional cigarettes.

**Why are kids trying it?**

Peer pressure and managing stress are some of the main reasons that kids start vaping, even "high-achievers." And, as kids learn about how it makes them feel, they may become addicted and use it to cope with stress, anxiety, or social situations.

**Is there regulation?**

No. No vaping product has been approved by the FDA as a safe and effective way to quit smoking. In 2017, the FDA published a rule clarifying that products made or derived from tobacco are regulated as tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and vaping devices. And, while the FDA has issued an enforcement policy on flavored e-cigarette products, including fruit and candy flavors that appeal to kids, manufacturers are finding loopholes and continuing to market flavors to kids.

**What is Big Tobacco's involvement?**

Vaping companies are largely owned by "Big Tobacco." According to the American Lung Association, tobacco companies have repackaged the same product and marketing tactics used to sell cigarettes to target a new generation of young users to use vape products. As parents, you are the best line of defense when it comes to educating and protecting your children.